CIA Front Man Knew of Watergate

By Jack Anderson

CIA front man Robert Bennett, son of veteran Sen. Wallace Bennett (R-Utah) has conceded that he knew a White House burglary-bugging team was on the prowl in advance of the celebrated Watergate break-in.

A secret memorandum, written by his CIA case officer, states that the senator's son withheld vital information from the authorities.

In an interview with my associate Les Whitten, Bennett acknowledged he knew at least three days before the Watergate burglary that White House aide E. Howard Hunt and his second-story crew had plotted to break into the campaign headquarters of Sen. George McGovern (D-S.D.) and bug the place.

Instead of reporting the conspiracy to the police, Bennett kept his mouth shut. He also confided to his CIA contact that he had held back information from the original Watergate prosecutors when they later questioned him about the Watergate break-in.

Had Bennett informed the police of the plot to bust into McGovern headquarters, as the law requires, the subsequent Watergate caper would have been aborted and the course of history might have been changed.

This episode is another link in the mysterious CIA involvement in Watergate. We uncovered the first piece of the puzzle as early as April 7, 1973, when we reported that the CIA had "ordered its agents not to talk to the FBI about the explosive Watergate case." Thereafter, we published several reports about the CIA and Watergate, but the full story still hasn't been told.

The CIA used Bennett's public relations firm, Mullen and Company, as a spy front. On its payroll was none other than Howard Hunt, the Watergate conspirator, who came to the firm from the CIA and later moved over to the White House.

Bennett's nephew referred a Brigham Young University student, named Thomas Gregory, to Hunt who recruited the young man as a political spy. Gregory infiltrated the campaigns of the President's two chief Democratic rivals—first, Sen. Edmund Muskie's staff, then Sen. George McGovern's staff.

But Gregory, a conscientious Mormon, became uneasy about his undercover work. He spoke to his bishop about it, who was concerned about the ethics of the job.

Then Gregory went back to Bennett and explained his misgivings. As Bennett related it, Gregory had been told by Hunt to work late one night at McGovern headquarters and leave a door open so the White House burglars could sneak in.

Gregory informed Bennett that Hunt was "reporting to someone higher up." Hunt's White House connections impressed young Gregory. Bennett said he also felt Hunt would do nothing illegal because "he had a full-time lawyer advising him." The lawyer, it turned out, was Hunt's co-conspirator, G. Gordon Liddy.

Bennett said he advised Gregory "to get out." The troubled student gave Bennett a letter of resignation to deliver to Hunt. Two days later the Hunt-Liddy team broke into the Watergate.

Bennett was called in for questioning six times by the original Watergate prosecutors. He held back Gregory's vital information out of loyalty to the youth, Bennett claims.

But the prosecutors traced Bennett's long-distance telephone toll calls to Gregory. When Bennett learned this, he called the prosecutors and said: "Look, you've found Tommy. I'll tell you about Tommy."

This helped the prosecutors to break the Watergate case.

Pentagon Puppet: Once again, we have caught Rep. F. Edward Hebert (D-La.) playing Charlie McCarthy to the Pentagon's Edgar Bergen. Perched upon the Defense Department's knee, he opens his mouth and the military speaks.

A month ago, we reported that Hebert, the imperious chairman of the House Armed Service Committee, had presented to the House a report on military aid to Saigon which was copied, virtually word for word, from Pentagon testimony.

Now the crusty old congressional "watchdog" has done it again. Included in his committee report on the Pentagon's supplemental budget request is a section on the Navy's proposal for a permanent base on the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia.

It is practically a carbon copy of testimony offered by Adm. Elmo Zumwalt, the Navy chief, before a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on March 20.

Apparently, Hebert's only disagreement with the Pentagon is over grammar. He tinkered slightly with the Navy's paragraphing and punctuation. He also edited out some of Zumwalt's "I's" and "we's" and substituted a few "observers."

"I always knew Hebert and his boys were pushovers for the Pentagon," one of Hebert's committee members told us, "but I never expected them to prove it so decisively. I am ashamed to say that right now the committee is nothing but a rubber stamp for the Pentagon."

Footnote: Repeated calls to the committee for comment have not been returned.

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